

Tattoo Unfolded the Mistaken Identity or Created?

Dr. Manoj Somani^{1*}, Dr. Sangram Singh Yadav¹, Dr. Anil Garg²¹PG Resident, Deptt of FMT, BPS GMCW, Khanpur Kalan, Sonipat, Haryana India²Professor, Deptt of FMT, BPS GMCW, Khanpur Kalan, Sonipat, Haryana IndiaDOI: [10.36347/sjams.2021.v09i07.005](https://doi.org/10.36347/sjams.2021.v09i07.005)

| Received: 03.06.2021 | Accepted: 05.07.2021 | Published: 11.07.2021

*Corresponding author: Dr. Manoj Somani

Abstract

Case Report

The identification of unknown bodies is of outstanding importance for a well-functioning rule of law. Received a dead body of male individual referred on the grounds of advance stage of putrefaction. Primarily body was identified by the relatives with help of clothes and shoes. The body came to our department as a known case. On post mortem examination it was observed that the body had a tattoo over dorsum of right forearm which become more prominent after removing the skin of that area. The clothes of the deceased were thoroughly examined. Later on due to presence of this tattoo and discrepancy in clothes, relatives refused to take over the body and known case turned out to be an unknown case again. Thus, taking into account of all the accessible data, tattoos can be of great importance in the identification process and can provide useful information even in advanced stages of putrefaction.

Keywords: Tattoo, Identification, putrefaction.

Copyright © 2021 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.

INTRODUCTION

Identity is the determination of the individuality of a person [1]. Article 6 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, that everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law [2]. The identification of unknown bodies is of outstanding importance for a well-functioning rule of law. It serves to maintain legal security within the society and enables relatives and friends to receive certainty as a prerequisite for farewell and mourning. Furthermore, it is the fulfilment of a final moral and legal obligation towards the deceased [3].

The protocol defines primary identifiers as odontology, fingerprints, DNA profile and secondary identifiers as individual physical characteristics, e.g. tattoos as appropriate methods to clarify the identity of an unknown body [3].

Scars, Marks and Tattoo are imprints on the skin that have been shown to be useful by law enforcement agencies for identification of a non-skeletonized body [4]. Tattooing refers to marking of the skin by puncturing and introducing pigmented material. Although it derives from a Polynesian word, tautau, decorative tattooing has been found in most societies over many centuries. The purpose of tattooing has varied from simple decoration, to a marker of social

rank, criminal and non-criminal group membership, or a particular rite of passage in tribal communities. Tattoos have become more common in recent years in younger individuals and so should be expected to be found with increasing incidence at the time of forensic autopsy examinations [5].

CASE REPORT

On 22/10/2020, dead body of a male individual was brought to the mortuary of Bhagat Phool Singh Government Medical College for Women, Khanpur Kalan, and Sonipat for medicolegal Post Mortem examination. Body was referred from general hospital Ambala city by board of medical officers on the ground of putrefaction of the body. According to referring letter it was difficult for them to ascertain the exact cause and mode of death due to putrefaction. Post mortem was done on 22/10/2020 at BPS GMCW by board of two doctors.

An unknown body was found at Ambala along side of Delhi Chandigarh highway which was kept at GH Ambala city as unknown for identification. On third day two persons came from Mumbai looking for a person who was missing during his business tour from Delhi to Punjab about one week before the discovery of body. The last network location of phone of missing person was near to discovery site of the body. Primary

identification of the body was done by the relatives on the basis of clothes and shoes at GH Ambala city and unknown case turned to be known at that place.

The body came to our department as a known case. The clothes and belongings of the deceased were thoroughly examined. On post mortem examination it was observed that body was in bloated stage of putrefaction and was emitting foul smell and smudged with crawling maggots, areas of epidermal slippage was present over whole body. Face was distended; bloated, dark colored and facial features were not identifiable. On further examination we found 1 green colored tattoo mark of SONU ASHA in Hindi vernacular which was present over dorsum of right forearm over an area of 4 cm x 4 cm. Later on due to presence of this tattoo and discrepancy in clothes, relatives refused to take over the body as the deceased body did not belong to them and known case turned out to be an unknown case again. After that body was handed over to police official along with femur bone for DNA analysis.



Fig-1: Body showing advanced stage of putrefaction



Fig-2: Tattoo on the right arm

DISCUSSION

The identification of unknown bodies is of outstanding importance in many ways. The identification of an unknown body is a moral obligation towards the deceased, and of outstanding importance for a society. The method of identification used in every single case should be scientifically sound, reliable, and yield results within a reasonable amount of time [6]. The value of morphological methods to identify unknown bodies is beyond doubt. The relevant morphological features need to be present in the respective population and be known or authentically documentable in ante-mortem samples. The characteristics should be persistent and resistant to post-mortem changes, and the possibility of documenting them on post-mortem should be granted [7].

All available ante-mortem and post-mortem information should be used to quickly and safely identify an unknown corpse, based on sound and reliable forensic scientific investigations. Tattoos are features that are usually easy to document during autopsy. Tattoos give specific identifying clues. Tattooing refers to any scar, branding, mark, tattoo, or other permanent human body art or modification deliberately placed on the body for purposes of decoration, ornamentation, or adornment [4].

Tattoos have been used in ancient cultures for thousands of years to indicate tribal identity and have served as rites of passage, marks of status and rank, symbols of religious, decorations for bravery, marks of fertility, pledges of love, punishment, amulets and talismans, protection, and as the marks of outcasts, slaves and convicts. Traditionally tattoos were produced by either cutting the skin and rubbing in soot or other pigments, or by using sticks or bones dipped in pigment. These days' tattoos are usually produced by using electric machines with multiple needles that pick up ink and inject it into the dermis. Dyes include India ink, cadmium, chromium, cobalt salts and mercuric sulphide [8].

Tattoos may be useful when radiotherapy is being given for a malignancy, as small dots or crosses may provide permanent points of orientation for further treatment [9].

As dermal pigments in tattoos remain in situ for years, the identification of the type, pattern and number of tattoos may be an extremely useful adjunct to identifying an unknown decedent [10]. This can occur even with quite pronounced putrefactive changes and loss of superficial skin layers. In fact, tattoo pigments are embedded in the skin to such a depth that even severe burns will often not destroy a tattoo. Mistakes in the spelling or script may provide further unique features to confirm identification [11].

There are also a number of other pieces of information that may be derived from tattoos that include possible previous occupation and club/gang affiliations, previous military service, names of family members, medical conditions, previous travel destinations, drug taking habits, prison history, and religious and cultural background [9].

Parts of dismembered bodies may have identifying tattoos, such as the right arm of the murder victim, James Smith that had a tattoo of two boxers. In 1935 he had been murdered and dismembered, and then dumped at sea where the arm was ingested by a passing tiger shark. The shark subsequently disgorged the arm after its capture and display at an aquarium in Sydney, Australia [12].

CONCLUSION

Taking into account of all the accessible data, tattoos can be of great importance in the identification process, either as a standalone identification method or as a complementary tool depending on the circumstances of the individual case. The style and design of tattoos may give an approximate age or cultural background of the decedent. If the design is a custom piece it may be identifiable by an artist. As dermal pigments in tattoos remain in situ for years, the identification of the type, pattern and number of tattoos may be an extremely useful adjunct to the identification of an unknown decedent. This can occur even with quite pronounced putrefactive changes and loss of superficial skin layer. Appropriate photographs should be taken before conduction post mortem examination, particularly when the identification is in question as tattoos can reflect an exact identity.

REFERENCES

1. Aggarwal, A. (2021). Forensic medicine and toxicology. 2nd ed. New Delhi: Avichal Publishing Company, 101.
2. General Assembly Resn. 217-A (III) dt 10.12.1948, UN General Assembly Official records, 3rd Session, Supp No 13, 71-77.
3. Bringruber, C.G., Martinez, E.G., Blanco, L.C., Holz, F. (2020). The use of tattoos to identify unknown bodies. *Rechtsmedizin*, 30; 219-24.
4. Jain, A., Chen, Y., & Park, U. (2007). Scars, marks & tattoos (SMT): Physical attributes for person identification. Department of Computer Science, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, Tech. Rep. MSUCSE-07-22.
5. Byard, G.W. (2013). Tattoos: forensic considerations. *Foren Sci Med Pathol*, 9(4); 534-42.
6. Disaster Victim identification guide. <https://www.interpol.int/How-we-work/Forensics/Disaster-Victim-Identification-DVI>. [Accessed 11Mar2021].
7. Caplova, Z., Obertova, Z., Gibelli, D. M., De Angelis, D., Mazzarelli, D., Sforza, C., & Cattaneo, C. (2018). Personal identification of deceased persons: an overview of the current methods based on physical appearance. *Journal of forensic sciences*, 63(3), 662-671.
8. Sperry, K. (1991). Tattoos and tattooing. Part I: History and methodology. *The American journal of forensic medicine and pathology*, 12(4), 313-319.
9. Cains, G. E., & Byard, R. W. (2009). The forensic and cultural implications of tattooing. In *Forensic pathology reviews* (pp. 197-220). Humana Press.
10. Prahlow, J., Byard, R.W. (2012). *An atlas of forensic pathology*. New York: Springer Publishers.
11. Byard, R. W., & Winskog, C. (2010). Potential problems arising during international disaster victim identification (DVI) exercises.
12. Copleston, V.M. (1986). *Shark attack*. Melbourne: Pacific Books, 14-22.